

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 613

EA 030 252

AUTHOR Howley-Rowe, Caitlin
TITLE Engaging with School Improvement: A Study of Factors Influencing Initial and Sustained Involvement in the Quest Network.
INSTITUTION Appalachia Educational Lab., Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-11-00
NOTE 69p.
CONTRACT RJ96006001
AVAILABLE FROM AEL, Inc., P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348. Tel: 304-347-0400; Tel: 800-624-9120 (Toll Free); Fax: 304 347-0487; e-mail: aelinfo@ael.org; Web site: <http://www.ael.org>.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; School Culture; *School Involvement

ABSTRACT

Quest is a school-improvement program based on principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research. Quest supports and investigates ongoing school-improvement efforts through rallies, summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This report discusses an exploratory, multi-method study of the factors a sample of Quest participants believed had been important to their schools' initial and sustained involvement with the project. Six focus-group interviews were conducted with 41 Quest network members, and 26 telephone interviews and 58 surveys concerning factors affecting engagement were completed. To compare schools' levels of involvement in the network, ratings were assigned each school, indicating an assessment of the extent of its engagement. Elementary and high school data were also compared. In terms of qualitative results, administrative support--both logistical and moral--was cited most often as the factor most important to initial and sustained engagement with Quest. Also important were: the reliability of funding to support participation; the relevance of Quest to schools' current concerns, goals, and beliefs; and the schoolwide consensus for involvement in the network. Elementary schools rated more highly than high schools in the importance of time to do improvement work at their schools, the amount of time available for professional development, and the role of vision for learning as a factor in their schools' initial involvement in Quest. Six items are appended, including the Focus Group Protocol, the Quest Engagement Survey, and the Completed Evaluation Standards Checklist. (DFR)

Engaging with School Improvement: A Study of Factors Influencing Initial and Sustained Involvement in the Quest Network



Caitlin Howley-Rowe

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AEL, Inc.

P.O. Box 1348 • Charleston WV 25325 • 800-624-9120

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in the Quest Network

Caitlin Howley-Rowe

November 1999

AEL, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348 • Charleston, West Virginia 25325 • 800-624-9120

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Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325-1348
304-347-0400
800-624-9120
304-347-0487 (fax)
aelinfo@ael.org
<http://www.ael.org>

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RJ96006001. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After a year and a half of nurturing a continuous school improvement network, staff of the Quest project at AEL became interested in what factors impact engagement with school reform. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools (see Appendix A). As the project evolved between 1997 and 1999 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a-g; 1999a-c), Quest staff observed that some school teams attended project events consistently, contributed frequently to network activities, and remained in regular contact. Other schools continued their involvement, but with less intensity, while a third group of schools chose not to maintain their participation with the network. Quest staff also recalled the difficulty with which they had recruited high schools and hypothesized that there were differences between school levels in their ability to engage with school reform.

This report discusses an exploratory, multimethod study conducted by Quest staff of the factors a sample of Quest participants believed had been important to their schools' initial and sustained involvement with the project. Six focus group interviews were conducted with 41 Quest network members; telephone interviews were conducted with 26 less engaged participants; and 58 surveys concerning factors affecting engagement were completed and returned to Quest staff. To compare differences in ratings of factors by participants hailing from various schools with disparate levels of involvement in the network, ratings were assigned each school indicating an assessment of the extent of its engagement. In addition, elementary and high school data were compared.

In terms of qualitative results, administrative support, both logistical and moral, was cited most often as the factor most important to initial and sustained engagement with Quest. Also important were the availability of funding to support participation, relevance of Quest to schools' current concerns, goals, and beliefs, and schoolwide consensus for involvement in the network.

Tests of statistical significance were conducted, although their assumptions were violated in this study, in order to provide exploratory insights. *T*-tests indicated that elementary schools, at statistically significant levels, rated more highly than high schools the importance of the amount of time needed to do improvement work at their schools, the amount of time available for professional development, and the vision for learning in their schools to their schools' initial involvement in Quest. In terms of sustained engagement, at statistically significant levels elementary schools continued to rate more highly the amount of time needed to do improvement work and available for professional development. The importance of the ways in which Quest supports schools improvement, such as via rallies and co-ventures, to continued involvement was rated statistically significantly higher by elementary schools, as well.

Analyses of variance (ANOVA) located 12 statistically significant differences in ratings between the most engaged, moderately, and least engaged schools. For instance, highly involved schools found personal beliefs about education and change, the ways Quest supports school improvement, and Quest processes statistically significantly more important to their schools' initial involvement than did the least engaged schools. The scheduling of Quest events, relevance of Quest to the schools, and the match between school and Quest network goals, among other factors, were rated more important to sustained involvement by highly involved schools than by both moderately and least engaged schools.

Concluding remarks suggest that there are several important differences in the significance of various factors to elementary and high schools, and to the most, moderately, and least involved Quest schools. Recommendations include courting administrative support for school reform initiatives in various ways, ensuring that Quest remain relevant to current school concerns and undertakings, and offering support to those schools confronting logistical obstacles to network participation. In addition, it is recommended that further and more rigorous study of engagement be conducted.

INTRODUCTION

School improvement is increasingly viewed as an ongoing and comprehensive process. Recent legislation has encouraged the adoption of such a view, with the 1998 appropriation of \$150 million by Congress to states for allocation to schools undertaking research-based schoolwide reform programs through the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD). Earlier, in 1994, Congress altered regulations to allow schools receiving Title I funds, with free and reduced lunch 50% and above, to use such funds for whole school improvement (American Institutes for Research, 1999).

The reform models mentioned in the legislation instituting CSRD encompass a variety of approaches to reform, from skill-based, to comprehensive, to processual. In addition, the models vary in their degree of prescriptiveness. All claim to be based upon research and to have evidence of some positive impact. Yet investigations of and prototypes for school improvement extend far beyond the models forwarded in CSRD legislation: Contemporary literature on school improvement has roots in the school effectiveness literature of the 1970s and early 80s (Levine & Lezotte, 1995).

Much current research suggests that the interplay between school cultural and structural conditions significantly affects how change at a particular school will be greeted (e.g., Newmann & Wehlage, 1996). They contend that if cultural characteristics, such as commitment to high expectations, support for inquiry, and caring relationships, intersect with structural factors, such as time for staff development and freedom from excessive organizational constraints, school reform will proceed more smoothly. Along with these intersections, school leadership must be an integral part of improvement efforts (van der Bogert, 1998), and collaboration among the many stakeholders in school communities must be pursued (Sarason & Lorentz, 1998). Fullan and Miles (1994) additionally suggest that those involved in improvement must recognize that it is a journey, one filled with ambiguity, uncertainty, and risk, rather than a scripted, easily implemented recipe.

While an abundance of education research has focused on what practices and conditions contribute to continuous school improvement (e.g., American Institutes for Research, 1999; Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Newmann, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994), relatively less attention has been given to the reasons schools are willing or able to maintain their engagement with a particular strategy or program over time. For example, Slavin, Dolan, and Madden (1994, p. 30) argue that, "To survive the inevitable changes of superintendents, principals, teachers, and district policies, school staffs need to feel that there is a valued and important group beyond the confines of their district that cares and supports what they are doing." Yet the very participation of a school in such a group beyond their district may depend substantially on the moral and financial support of those within the district.

Staff of the Quest project at AEL were especially interested in this issue after a year and a half of nurturing a continuous school improvement network. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and

mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools (see Appendix A). As the project evolved between 1997 and 1999 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a-g; 1999a-c), Quest staff observed that some school teams attended project events consistently, contributed frequently to network activities, and remained in regular contact. Other schools continued their involvement, but with less intensity, while a third group of schools chose not to maintain their participation with the network.

In addition, Quest staff recalled the challenges they had faced when recruiting schools to participate in the network. Elementary schools were relatively easy to recruit, whereas high schools often reported that they were unable to participate. This led project staff to hypothesize that high schools operated in a context inhibiting their ability to become engaged in a long-term endeavor like Quest, whereas elementary schools were less hindered in so doing.

A review of the literature suggested that a variety of factors at the school level and at the network or project level impact a school's capacity to sustain involvement over time in a reform effort facilitated by an external agency or consultant. At the school level, logistical factors such as lack of time to attend project events or to implement improvement strategies (D'Amico & Corbett, 1988; Louis & Miles, 1990), difficulty acquiring substitute coverage during teacher attendance at events (Selzter & Himley, 1995), scheduling conflicts (Education Commission of the States, 1996), and lack of funding (Useem et al., 1995) are impediments to ongoing participation. These fundamental, practical considerations appear to bear considerably on a school's ability to become and remain involved in an externally facilitated change process.

Several factors associated with leadership also appear to be important to a school's continued involvement with a reform effort. Turnover in leadership threatens continuity, for instance (Education Commission of the States, 1996), as does inconsistent principal participation in project efforts (Goldman & Dunlap, 1990). A building leader's vision (Slavin, 1998) and the district stance vis a vis the reform (Cuttance, 1994; D'Amico & Corbett, 1988; Useem et al., 1995) also are found to be important factors in sustaining reform momentum. Schoolwide consensus for the initiative is likewise noted as a factor significant to the livelihood of reform endeavors (D'Amico & Corbett, 1988; Honig, 1994; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1994; Louis & Miles, 1990; Slavin, Dolan, & Madden, 1994). Citing an evaluation of eight schools participating in the Essential Schools network, Honig reports that "where reform did not take, no real consensus for change was initially developed; indeed, many teachers who gave lip service to the reforms at the start became hostile when changes threatened to affect them directly" (1994, p. 794). Thus, schoolwide agreement to undertake change impacts personal willingness to tolerate the ambiguity and additional work associated with implementation.

Other issues influencing the success of reform include adequacy of information given school staff about the improvement project (Goldman & Dunlap, 1990), relevance of the reform to the school (D'Amico & Corbett, 1988; Slavin, 1998), and personal beliefs about education and change (Cuttance, 1994). Some researchers suggest that the subjective experiences and perspectives of those involved in reform are vital to its viability (Fullan, 1991); others contend that individuals confront particular concerns as they progress through implementation (Hord et al., 1987). The history of

prior reform efforts within a school is also forwarded as an important variable (D'Amico & Corbett, 1988).

School structural issues are additional factors important to the success of school reform. Reform at the high school level may confront greater challenges than reform undertaken at elementary schools because of "high school organizational complexity" (Useem et al., 1995). Put another way, the degree of interdependence between grade-level groups, departments, or teams plays a role in how well a reform effort is received and supported over time (D'Amico & Corbett, 1988).

Some of the literature suggests that the success of school improvement work depends as much on characteristics of the particular reform or approach as on school factors. Moreover, the ways a reform coincides with a school's goals, values, and readiness for change significantly impact its longevity. D'Amico and Corbett (1988), for instance, argue that any improvement initiative must address one of a school district's two highest priorities if it is to succeed. They elaborate that implementation of reform is the result of the interaction between the conditions of local context and the processes used to carry out improvement efforts. Similarly, Slavin (1998) contends that change may not take place because of a mismatch between the type of reform and a school's readiness for it.

Nonetheless, Quest staff found relatively little research on the factors that impact schools' willingness to undertake school improvement efforts with the assistance of outside consultants or organizations. Nor was there much research concerning the variables influencing schools' involvement over time in such efforts. Other questions of interest were whether respondents from elementary and high schools found various factors of more or less importance to their schools' participation, and whether those from schools of varying degrees of involvement with the project also made different assessments.

Quest staff decided to conduct an exploratory, multimethod study of issues the literature suggested were significant to schools' engagement with reform by sampling participants in the Quest network for continuous improvement. This report describes the study and its findings.

The primary audience for this report is Quest staff. It is intended to provide them some empirical elaboration of the factors a sample of Quest network participants perceived to be important to initial and continued involvement with a long-term school improvement project. Additionally, findings from this study may assist Quest staff as they continue to develop the project. Secondary audiences for this report include others interested in sustaining school reform initiatives over time, from school reform model developers to central office administrators to other school improvement researchers.

METHODOLOGY

Using several data sources in order to corroborate these is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research" or "triangulation." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. Therefore, a variety of data was collected throughout this study to provide a fuller account of the factors assisting or impeding schools' participation in the Quest network.

First, focus group interviews were conducted with participants at each of two rallies convened in February 1999. Only those network members who had attended at least one prior Quest event were asked to participate in the focus groups; project staff hypothesized that those who were attending a Quest event for the first time might have less knowledge about the interview issues. There was a total of 147 individuals in the network who had attended at least one project event before February. New attendees participated in an orientation session while more veteran members were interviewed via focus groups.

The focus group methodology was chosen because it would allow staff to gather a variety of perspectives from a larger number of network members than they might obtain during phone interviews. In addition, the presence of network participants at the rallies made the facilitation of focus groups all the more efficient. Ultimately, those who participated in the focus group interviews comprised a convenience sample of those individuals from moderately to highly engaged schools who were present at the February 1999 rallies (N=41). No attempts were made to contact the remaining 49 team members from the same schools who did not attend, as project staff thought the convenience sample was sufficient for exploratory purposes.

Three focus groups were conducted between approximately 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. on February 15, 1999, at the Patrick Henry Hotel in Roanoke, Virginia, during a Quest high school network rally that six school teams attended. One focus group consisted of five building administrators, while the remaining two groups of six and seven participants included teachers, parents, and students. Each focus group was led by a Quest staff member trained in focus group facilitation, who used a predesigned interview protocol.

Three more focus groups were held between approximately 3:20 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. on February 22, 1999, at the Wyndham Garden Hotel in Lexington, Kentucky, during a Quest elementary school network rally that six school teams attended. As in the earlier round of focus groups, one consisted exclusively of five school building administrators. The other two groups, of nine each, included teachers and parents. Again, the focus group interviews were conducted by Quest staff trained in focus group facilitation using a predesigned interview protocol. A total of 41 Quest network members were interviewed via the six focus groups conducted in February 1999.

However, those network members who attended the February rallies tended to hail from schools that had been relatively committed to and engaged with the project over time. Quest staff

also hoped to understand the perspectives of those who had been less engaged with, or had dropped out of, the network (N=57). During the spring and early summer of 1999, therefore, project staff conducted telephone interviews with members of recidivist Quest teams and with network participants whose schools had not sent teams to the February rallies. Two weeks before phone interviewing commenced, project staff mailed all prospective interviewees a one-page letter describing the study, requesting their participation, and providing contact information. Twenty-six of the 57 individuals in this subgroup participated in the telephone interviews.

Survey data also were collected from network members, former and present, who had attended at least one project event before the February 1999 rallies. Attendees meeting this criterion at both rallies were requested to complete the Quest Engagement Survey following the focus groups. The survey consisted of 24 diverse factors hypothesized to be important to schools' involvement in a school improvement network such as Quest. These factors were based upon variables suggested by the literature as well as several proposed by Quest staff. Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale how important each factor was, first, to their school's initial decision to become involved with Quest, and second, to their school's sustained involvement with the network. Anchor points on the scale were 1 (*very unimportant*) and 5 (*very important*), and response options included a *don't know* reply.

The surveys were collected by focus group facilitators following each focus group. Thirty-nine surveys were returned from the total 41 focus group interviewees. Phone interviewees from recidivist or less engaged schools were also asked to complete the survey. Quest staff offered to administer the survey over the phone or to fax the survey for respondents to complete on their own. Later in the interviewing cycle, when school was no longer in session, respondents were offered the additional options of receiving the survey by mail or e-mail. Nineteen surveys were completed by the 26 respondents who participated in the phone interviews. Thus, a total of 58 surveys were completed and returned. If the total sample is conceived to be those who participated in the focus groups (N=41) or in the telephone interviews (N=26), the survey return rate would be 88%. More conservatively, including focus group participants (N=41) and all those Quest staff attempted to contact by telephone (N=57), the return rate would be 59%.

In sum, 67 Quest network members participated in the study, representing 46% of the total 147 network members. Forty-one participated in focus groups, and 26 in telephone interviews. Of the total study participants, 58 completed the survey, 39 of whom were also focus group participants and 19 of whom were also phone interviewees.

Quest staff hypothesized that participants from schools with different levels of involvement with the project might confront different issues impacting their participation, as might high school and elementary schools. Surveys were coded according to the school level of respondents, and Quest staff rated the level of each schools' involvement in the project on a 3-point scale. Schools assigned a 1 had dropped out of the network after participating in one or two early Quest events. Schools receiving a rating of 2 were moderately involved in the network, and those rated 3 were highly involved. The ratings were based on Quest staff's assessments of how consistently schools attended

project meetings, their use of Quest as a resource beyond scheduled project gatherings, their level of communication with Quest staff between events, and their apparent willingness to continue participation. Three Quest staff conducted the ratings, with a high level of consensus about rating assignments. Four schools received a rating of 1 (three elementary and one high school), ten a rating of 2 (three elementary and seven high schools), and seven a rating of 3 (five elementary and two high schools). Eleven participants from schools rated 1 returned the survey, 22 from schools rated 2, and 25 from schools rated 3.

Following data collection, five of the six focus group interviews were transcribed. The sixth focus group accidentally was not tape recorded, although the facilitator wrote detailed notes during the interview. These were typed for use during data analysis. Quest staff recorded responses received during each telephone interview on an interview protocol form. Replies were later entered into a WordPerfect file. Focus group data were analyzed by theme using NUD*IST software, and telephone interviews were analyzed by question and theme manually. Each theme was coded, and the occurrence of each theme was tabulated. Survey data were entered into an SPSS database, and statistics were analyzed using the same software.

Descriptive statistics for the entire sample—elementary and high school respondents separately, and respondents from least, moderately, and highly engaged schools separately—were generated using SPSS. *T* tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA) were also conducted, although it should be noted that the assumptions of these two statistical tests were violated in this study. The sample was not random, nor was it assumed that the data were drawn from a normally distributed population or that the samples had homogenous variances. Such tests of statistical significance were used in an exploratory fashion, as the purpose for Quest staff of conducting them in this study is to identify differences for future, more rigorous exploration. Nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney *U* and Kruskal-Wallis) were also performed, their results closely approximating those of the parametric tests. Post hoc tests following ANOVAs included the Scheffe test for groups determined by Levene's test for homogeneity of variance to have equal variances and Dunnett's *C* for those not possessing equal variances.

There were several limitations to this study. First, response rates for participants from schools that had dropped out of or were less engaged with the Quest network were lower than those from schools that were moderately to highly involved. More engaged schools sent teams to the February rallies at which data for this study were collected, enhancing their response rates. Data collection from less engaged or uninvolved schools not in attendance at the February rallies was hampered by the challenges of phone interviews: Reaching teachers at school was difficult given their classroom commitments, some potential interviewees did not return phone calls, and home phone numbers were unavailable for 21 individuals from less involved or recidivist schools. The lack of home phone numbers particularly impacted response rates as much phone interviewing took place at the end of the school year.

A related limitation concerns sampling. Although convenience samples and smaller samples are appropriately used for exploratory studies, their validity and generalizability are restricted

(Brewer & Hunter, 1989). In other words, although the sample for this study was drawn from the population of Quest network participants, and may be generalizable to other Quest members, it may not represent the perspectives of educators involved in other reform endeavors because of the use of nonprobability sampling techniques. On the other hand, and appropriately for an exploratory investigation, the sample was drawn from a theoretically defined universe—school community members engaged in school reform work. Thus, as Brewer and Hunter argue, data from this sample can be used to generalize by synecdoche as "a claim that the essential features of the larger social unit are reproduced in microcosm within the smaller social unit, and that by studying them in micro we might make inferences about the macrostructure of which they are a part" (p. 123). Nonetheless, statistical generalization is compromised in this study.

In addition, although it might have been revealing to investigate, for instance, differences between highly engaged elementary and high schools, or between least engaged elementary and high schools, such an examination would have rendered cell sizes too small to have much validity.

FINDINGS

Focus Group Findings

Network participants in attendance at the February 1999 rallies who had participated in at least one prior project event were asked during focus group interviews what factors were most important to their school's initial involvement in the Quest network and to their school's sustained involvement (see Appendix B). Probes on the focus group protocol requested that respondents differentiate between school and Quest factors. Analysis of the focus group transcriptions reveals that several themes appear important to both elementary and high school respondents.

By far, the theme most frequently mentioned by interviewees was the centrality of administrative support to their initial and sustained involvement in the Quest project. Participants reported that often the school building administrator or principal, rather than teachers or other school community members, initially noted the relevance of Quest to current school endeavors: Five high school and eight elementary school focus group interviewees noted that building administrators had directed or suggested involvement with the network. As two focus group interviewees described it,

"Well, Dr. Baldwin¹ just presented to the site-based council one night when we met saying that she had been contacted by AEL and she thought it would be a really good involvement for us. At that time, we still had to do the school improvement and all those plans and she thought it would help us in writing all those." [elementary school participant]

"I believe it was our improvement plan and continuously looking for new ways to improve our school. And we were asked if we wanted to participate. She didn't just decide yes, we're going The principal did present it as a good opportunity to go and learn some new things perhaps, or new strategies to improve our school. And . . . it did go along with our school improvement plan, also." [elementary school participant]

Rather than making explicit the relevance of the project to school efforts, central office administrators were reported to have simply directed staff to attend the first Quest rally or presented Quest as a professional development opportunity of which they might take advantage. Focus group interviewees noted 11 times that a central office administrator had facilitated their school's initial participation in the project.

"It was our superintendent. He just asked me to go as president of student council and he figured that he would take me along. He said I could see problems he couldn't see and that maybe we could fix them. Fix problems that he couldn't." [high school participant]

¹All names used in this report are pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of those participating in the Quest network.

"Our [involvement] was directed from the central office that this was a great program that our school should get involved in and it was very important knowledge on the first Quest trip by us who were coming as to what Quest was or what it was about and I was really quite surprised to find out it was a long commitment because I don't think we really knew what Quest was other than someone in our central office said, 'This is a good thing. You need to go.'" [high school participant]

"We had an interim superintendent again who was involved with AEL and really showed a lot of concern for our system even though he came there as a short-time superintendent, and he got us involved." [elementary school participant]

"Mr. Young—I think he made the decision and told faculty who he wants to be involved . . . So I think it was more or less the principal's decision." [elementary school participant]

Similarly, both elementary and high school participants reported that continued and active central office and building administrator support for involvement in the Quest project was vital to their school's ongoing participation. The importance of central office support was noted four times by elementary and four times by high school interviewees. Overwhelmingly, however, respondents thought that the support of the building-level administrator was most fundamental to their school's continued involvement with Quest. Mention of this theme was made 11 times by elementary respondents and 19 times by their high school counterparts. Participants put their perspectives in these ways:

"I feel like right now [our involvement with Quest] is really high because our principal is really actively involved, so therefore if a principal is actively involved and you know you have your school that's going to follow." [elementary school participant]

"I think the people at the administrative level are absolutely critical, because a student or a parent or even a teacher probably can't make it go once it gets back home. And so I know we need our administrative person, and we've got one with a lot of energy now, and I think it's going to make a huge difference." [high school participant]

"I think the teacher can keep it alive but maybe couldn't have made it really push. But having a committed administrator there is just really important." [high school participant]

"If you don't have the administrator, you have nothing at all." [high school participant]

Seven of the comments suggesting the significance of building-level administrative support for sustained involvement in the Quest network also referred to such administrators' willingness to secure or broker funding, released time, and substitute coverage to enable participant attendance at project meetings. For instance,

"I think what makes it easy for us to be involved is that our principal is totally in agreement and dedicated to the situation, and so that's never a question as far as freeing time to attend meetings or expenses or whatever it takes. She thinks it's a good thing, and we are committed to do this." [elementary school participant]

"I think it really has a lot to do with our staff and the fact that they can find money. Our principal can find money in places that we have no clue. We do not ask. We're just glad the money's there and she pays for us to come and it really helps. Because if we had to pay for it out of our pockets, I really don't think as many people would be able to come." [elementary school participant]

"Again, I think resourcefulness [is important to involvement]. I think, you know, having the principal back this really makes things possible. Because as I see it, and I'm on the outside, it costs the school money to be involved and all the teachers who are here . . . had to find money to find substitutes that are there with our children today and tomorrow. And just being here . . . so, to stay at the hotel and the food and everything . . ." [elementary school participant]

"While we can't get [our principal] to come [to Quest events], he's willing for us to go, and he's very supportive, and he helps us try to find funding and substitutes and all those kind of things." [high school participant]

Eleven comments also indicated the necessity of schoolwide consensus for involvement in Quest, including teachers, parents, and students, to the success of continued participation and to implementation efforts. Three participants reported that their school communities supported their affiliation with Quest, which in turn enhanced their schools' ongoing participation in the network. Asked what helped to sustain his school's involvement in the project, one elementary school participant replied, "Probably the active participation from all the faculty and staff and parents that we have there along with the principal." The remainder reported less schoolwide agreement about involvement, which they saw as impeding the success of their Quest work. As one elementary network interviewee phrased it, "If teachers have not really been involved, it's been hard for them to understand what we're doing."

A total of nine comments were offered about the importance of funding to participation in a network such as Quest. One high school focus group interviewee specifically noted the importance of funding received from AEL to support continued participation in the project: "The other factor is the money provided by AEL. If we didn't have the money, I wouldn't be here." Similarly, one participant noted that a reform model implemented at her high school provided financial assistance: "That's something that our High Schools That Work team has that we [Quest team] do not have . . . They've got the money from the High Schools That Work that's dedicated . . . just to the sub days and planning days."

Fifteen comments indicated that, while administrative support for attendance at Quest events was important, at least equally important was active administrative support for the school improvement endeavors Quest team members learned of during project events and intended to implement at their schools. Three high school interviewees, for instance, reported:

"[The administrators are] all for us coming down and coming back with new ideas and putting it to work at the school, and when we get back it's pretty much left up to us to do all the work."

"I think we've got an overall desire to improve, yet I'm not so sure that's driven by the administrators. It's that we, as Quest members, continue to go in and say, 'Hey, what are we doing on Quest lately?' or something like that. We kind of prod her along. Not that she's against Quest or anything like that. She just doesn't have the time for it."

"And I think that's a blind spot for administrators, because they send staff to meetings like this and expect us to come back and do things, and they don't realize the position that puts us in since we don't have the authority. My administrator has said to me, 'Well, why didn't you take that and run?' I couldn't run. How?"

Similarly, an elementary school participant reported,

"Our principal does her very best to motivate and inform and implement as many things as possible, and the teachers that have been to the Quest rallies, we've gone back and tried to share with colleagues and then implement things that we have chosen or found most valuable to use in our classroom." [elementary school participant]

Among the themes most often mentioned by focus group participants was the relevance of Quest goals to school goals, or the ways Quest coincided with particular school efforts. Participants reported that such relevance was necessary both to their schools' initial and continued engagement with the network. This theme was mentioned seven times by high school interviewees and 14 times by their elementary school counterparts. One respondent thought the relevance of Quest to school undertakings indicated redundancy:

"It's been a reoccurring [sic]—I don't want to say it's a problem. It's an occurrence that because we have High Schools That Work and the School Improvement Plan and Quest, we have school improvement going on in the school and it seems like the same things that we're doing for this we can also include in doing this in the other projects that we have going on at the time." [high school participant]

But other focus group participants who spoke about how school and Quest goals overlapped assessed such relevance positively, noting its significance to their involvement with the project. Several quotes are illustrative of this point.

"I would say that through Quest we have been able to use a lot of their ideals to enhance ours and to assess ours to see if we're going in the right direction and then I think as Sally said, too, I mean they overlapped and it's just like a support system so you're able to accomplish two things at once while you're doing whatever type of school improvement you're doing." [high school participant]

"Occasion had something to do with it, but then also we were at the process—just starting the process of accreditation. Getting re-accredited in School Renewal Process, so we used Quest as a vehicle to help out with that." [high school participant]

"When I think about our school . . . we're constantly trying to improve ourselves and this is just an outlet in order to do that. I mean, it's the best one I think that we've found to help us continuously improve ourselves because we all want to be the best we can be and AEL helps us do that." [elementary school participant]

"I think that it was our parent program and it just kind of fell into what we were already doing instead of something new that we were . . . it was just kind of . . . we were already doing it and we could just continue." [elementary school participant]

Another theme mentioned often was the ambiguity participants felt as they began their involvement with Quest. Twelve comments were made about this theme, although it should be noted that 10 were forwarded during one high school focus group in which interviewees had a spontaneous discussion on the topic. Eight of the comments indicated that participants felt the information they received initially about Quest was unclear.

"I was really quite surprised to find out it was a long commitment, because I don't think we really knew what Quest was other than someone in our central office said, 'This is a good thing you need to go to.'" [high school participant]

"I knew it was about school improvement, and that was about it." [high school participant]

The remaining four of these comments noted continuing challenges Quest team members faced in communicating about Quest to their school colleagues. For example,

"And that's partly our responsibility and partly AEL's for not giving them that [information] initially, I guess. That if they knew more about it, and I think especially if they knew more about that it's not just a bunch of research, but it's actually ideas being shared and that kind of stuff, I think there'd be more teachers involved." [high school participant]

"But the paper you gave us today, the two pages on Quest, we should have had day one, because it's been unbelievably difficult to explain to parents, to explain to students, to my student government . . . you know, what this is, because there hasn't been anything that says, you know, what it is." [high school participant]

Mention was made nine times of the difficulty in managing competing priorities in order to continue participation in the Quest network. These priorities ranged from implementation of various reform initiatives to regular school duties such as teaching and grading.

"We have staff development that we have to do and school improvement that we have to do in Tennessee, and sometimes the feeling is this is in conflict." [elementary school participant]

"What would get in the way of our involvement would be the programs that we have still require a lot of time. For example, our after-school program." [elementary school participant]

"We had difficulty trying to find other teachers that would come with us because we had just went to the block [schedule] this year, and no one wanted to leave their class for two days." [high school participant]

A related concern was the time away from school that attendance at Quest events required. Mention was made of this theme six times by focus group respondents. Participants reported that their attendance depended on, as one put it, a "sacrifice" in both professional and personal time. A high school administrator said that taking time to attend Quest events created a rift in morale: "It becomes a morale issue for those teachers who are left behind to deal with things in our absence. When we get back there will be morale problems. 'If you hadn't gone to Quest . . .'"

Time to reflect on their progress, formulate plans, and implement improvement efforts was another theme of some importance to seven focus group respondents. Participants reported that while attendance at Quest meetings was affirming and useful, the time needed to implement school improvement strategies learned of from Quest was sometimes an impediment to their continued involvement. Asked what factors hindered school participation in Quest, one elementary school respondent put it this way:

"Time within your school day for faculty to get together and talk about issues and do real collegial sharing and discussion of the pros and cons of a particular program or something that Quest may have brought up and that you really need the faculty as a whole to understand because there are just two or three of us maybe that saw the Interview Design. Now we need to take it back to our faculty . . . When you have a school day that is extremely long and complex and there's no time for the whole faculty to get together except once a month after school. So I think that the time is a critical factor."

Eight comments were made about the networking with colleagues facilitated by Quest participation. Four participants noted that the potential of such opportunities to meet and exchange ideas with other educators informed their schools' first decision to become involved in the project. "I saw it as a wonderful opportunity to engage . . . with a larger group and to get ideas from other schools," reported one elementary network member. Four other respondents noted that the networking opportunities helped to sustain their engagement in the project. As one such elementary

school participant put it, "It's kind of give[n] us confidence to know that other schools are wanting all over the areas, wanting to improve our schools, and it's just give[n] us some ideas hearing from the other schools."

Seven elementary school participants reported that prior or current involvement with AEL facilitated their initial or continued participation with the Quest project. Five noted that the quality of their earlier experiences with AEL services convinced them to join Quest.

"I think we're involved because past work with AEL has been so successful and knowing the people and the quality of work . . . when there was an opportunity to do something else we jumped at it."

"We got involved because we'd had such great experiences with AEL and knew that anything AEL wanted to do was going to be top drawer because of the quality of the people and the sophistication and professional integrity of the organization."

Two others mentioned their involvement with another program facilitated by Quest staff, QUILT (Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Thinking). However, their comments do not clearly elaborate the relationship between participation in QUILT and Quest. Asked to describe their level of involvement with Quest, they replied,

"We've done the QUILT program and that has kept us abreast of everything that's going on, and we have had staff developments on QUILT . . . So, we are involved, very involved."

"One of the people . . . involved in the development of the QUILT program, is an administrator at our school . . . Certain ones are going to be going for the QUILT training and then coming back and training our staff as professional development this summer and to implement that into our daily working with the higher level questioning. And so I'd say we were very much involved."

These comments might be interpreted in at least two ways. First, perhaps the respondents meant to suggest that their additional contact with Quest staff through QUILT enhanced their commitment to or knowledge about Quest. Or, maybe the participants had elided the two projects conceptually.

Two elementary and five high school focus group interviewees reported the importance of scheduling to their continued participation in Quest, six citing their inability to attend events at particular points throughout the school year, such as during the administration of final exams. A seventh participant, from the high school network, spoke of the timing of project gatherings as contributing to momentum: "The timing of the conferences has been important, because as soon as you kind of lapse back into that dull lull, it's almost like there's another conference, and you renew your energy."

Yet another theme of some significance concerned a school community's willingness to accept feedback and implement change. Six comments were offered to suggest that involvement in Quest required a commitment to explore avenues of growth, and that for those interested in continuous improvement, change rendered with the support of Quest helped sustain school engagement in the network. Asked to describe what factors helped her school remain involved with the project, one elementary network participant responded,

"I would say a willingness to accept change, because when you're committed to Quest, things are going to happen. And if you are reluctant to change or drag your feet this is not for you. But if you're willing to change . . . and when you're ready to change, then it's going to be an alive environment, a moving, good thing."

Likewise, a high school network respondent reported,

"You wouldn't participate in this, I don't think, unless you were willing to acknowledge any fault that you might have. You know, be willing to make improvements. I don't think that you would participate in this as a school if you weren't willing to do that to some degree."

Comments made by three elementary and three high school network focus group participants intimate the ways affirmation received through Quest promotes ongoing participation in the project. Three participants spoke of affirmation in terms of "renewal" and "revitalization." The three remaining comments discuss affirmation in terms of using Quest staff as a sounding board for ideas or as "critical friends." For example, an elementary participant said,

"One of the things that I've found helps us stay involved is that the AEL staff has been so supportive and affirming. The co-venture was great, and to have people with the expertise and the experience of the AEL people saying that what we're doing is right and it's good and it's unique . . ."

Six comments, four from elementary and two from high school network members, were offered concerning the logistical difficulties to participation in Quest faced by small schools. Practical issues included lack of resources to support participation, challenges in "fielding a team," and the burden of maintaining many projects with few staff.

Other themes were forwarded by focus group participants with relatively less frequency. For instance, five participants discussed the importance of Quest as a resource for research and strategies to their schools' participation in the network, and four of their personal motivation to attend project events. The ways Quest encourages development of a Quest school team contributed to their schools' sustained participation, according to four respondents. Three comments suggested that the overlap of school and Quest philosophy or vision contributed to involvement; three others cited previous positive reform efforts.

Themes mentioned only twice included the importance of personal relationships with Quest staff, the inclusiveness of the Quest network, personal availability to attend project meetings, and the ways Quest participation intersected with personal growth.

Table 1 summarizes the themes most frequently mentioned by focus group participants as important to their schools' initial and sustained involvement in Quest.

Table 1
Important Factors Influencing Quest Involvement: Summary of Most Frequently
Mentioned Focus Group Themes

Theme	Frequency
Building-level administrative support for sustained involvement	30
Relevance of Quest to the school	21
Active building-level administrative support for school improvement projects	15
Building-level administrative support for initial involvement	13
Ambiguity about Quest	12
Central office support for initial involvement in Quest	11
Schoolwide consensus for sustained Quest involvement	11
Funding for sustained involvement in Quest	9
Other priorities competing with sustained Quest involvement	9

Interview Findings

Twenty-six individuals from four low and five moderately engaged Quest schools participated in telephone interviews conducted by trained Quest staff. Respondents were asked via a structured interview protocol (see Appendix C) to describe what factors at their school and of Quest had contributed to their schools' initial involvement in the network. Respondents from schools that had left the Quest network were requested to describe what school and Quest factors had hindered their schools' continued participation in Quest, while schools maintaining their involvement in the project were asked to describe what school and Quest factors had helped and hindered their ongoing participation.

Eight of the 26 interview respondents provided replies consisting of two or more themes when asked what school factors had been most important in determining their schools' initial participation in Quest. The remainder offered replies containing one theme. Eight respondents

reported that their schools' initial involvement had been most influenced by the interest in exploring the potential relevance of Quest to their schools. "We are a progressive school always looking for new programs," said one participant. Another respondent noted that her large school had been "trying to look at ways of improving things for the entire school population." Seven respondents indicated that the relevance of Quest to their schools had been apparent and influenced their decision to become involved. Of these, six noted specific areas to which they hoped Quest would be relevant: Two mentioned parent involvement, one community involvement, one work with small schools, one consolidation issues, and one concern with test scores.

Five responses indicated that the principal had initiated the schools' initial participation in Quest. Four respondents reported that initially they had very little information about the project. Initial involvement was facilitated by the district office, according to the three respondents from one school. Two respondents reported that they did not know what school factors had impacted their schools' first association with Quest. Two others said prior experience with AEL had influenced their initial decision. One reply each suggested that networking opportunities, faculty willingness to participate, availability of funding to attend, and curiosity had been important factors impacting schools' initial involvement in Quest. One response was unclear and was not coded.

Eleven of the 26 interview respondents offered replies with multiple themes when requested to describe what characteristics or factors of Quest had been most important in determining their schools' initial involvement in the network. The remainder offered replies with one theme. Nine respondents indicated that they had little or no information about Quest as their schools became involved and therefore could not offer definitive analyses of what about Quest encouraged their schools' participation. (Nonetheless, four of these respondents attempted to guess what Quest characteristics had been important.)

Five responses indicated that their schools' first involvement with Quest had been a trial run, and all five reported that their schools had assessed their experiences positively. Three of these, however, added that they had encountered "nothing new," as one put it, at their schools' first Quest rally. The relevance of Quest to their schools was noted by four participants as significant to their schools' first association with the project. Three replies each suggested the importance of networking opportunities, prior knowledge of AEL's services, and the opportunity to explore what Quest had to offer. Two respondents replied that Quest's non-directive philosophy had been important to their schools' initial engagement. One such respondent reported that she "liked the 'design-your-own' aspect" of Quest. Two responses each indicated the significance of the principals' initiation of involvement and of the opportunities for acquiring new information through Quest. One respondent suggested Quest processes had been important, while another noted the importance of opportunities for team building offered by the network. One reply was unclear and remained uncoded.

Nineteen of the 26 respondents provided replies with multiple themes when asked to identify what school factors had hindered or helped their schools' sustained involvement in Quest. More, and more lengthy, responses were offered concerning impediments to schools' continued

participation than were offered concerning factors facilitating long-term involvement. In other words, respondents had more to report about impediments than about encouragement of their schools' involvement.

In terms of hindrances to ongoing participation in Quest, 12 replies mentioned the presence of competing priorities at their schools. As one participant said, "[We're] completely overcommitted. The county has grant money with which they've started summer academics, and weekend and evening programs. [We have] no time at all. [There is] a shortage of people to do the work; many jobs have been combined." Similarly, a principal reported, "[I] am overwhelmed when I get back from meetings. [There are] so many things in a high school that require my attention . . . I work 10-14 hours per day." One respondent listed the many programs at her school for which staff had assumed responsibility: "Lots of things, federal grants . . . before-school program, after-school program, tutoring program . . . CCLC grant . . . summer academy . . . community classes. . . [We're] just burning out."

Eight replies indicated that a lack of administrative support impeded their schools' continued involvement in Quest. Two of these mentioned lack of central office support; the remainder pertained to the paucity of building-level administrative support. Six responses indicated that a lack of funding to attend Quest functions hindered their continued participation; four of these responses also contained the theme concerning lack of administrative support. One such participant said, "Money. We'd keep going if we didn't have to beg for it from the principal." Six replies suggested that a lack of time discouraged their schools' involvement. Four responses each indicated that a particularly difficult school year and a faculty reluctant to participate in Quest had hindered their schools' sustained association with the project. Two respondents reported that difficulties in acquiring substitute coverage for classes while they attended network gatherings had inhibited their schools' participation. School communication problems, lack of parent and community involvement in Quest, and faculty confusion about the relevance of Quest to their school were identified by one respondent each as impediments. One respondent reported that nothing at her school had hindered their involvement in the network.

Two replies each suggested that principal support and the relevance of Quest to the school had been important to their schools' ongoing participation. The adequacy of Quest communications, sharing ideas, and dedication of Quest team members were cited by one participant each as encouraging their schools' involvement.

Again, when asked what characteristics or factors of Quest inhibited or encouraged their schools' continued participation, more responses were offered concerning impediments. (Nonetheless, nine respondents indicated that nothing about Quest itself had hindered their participation, although three of these went on to mention that attendance at project events did require funding, which was a concern. A fourth participant reporting that nothing about Quest impeded involvement later noted that the relevance of the network to her school was ambiguous.) Seven respondents each cited competing priorities, lack of time, and funding as hindrances to their schools' continued involvement. Three replies suggested that the relevance of Quest to their schools was

unclear. Similarly, one respondent said, "[My school is] just not the type of school that's going to be involved." Two participants reported that they felt a sense of disjuncture after having missed one Quest rally: "If you missed a meeting, [it] was hard to go back. [You] felt you had missed out," as one phrased it. The other suggested that Quest meetings focus on one theme per year. Traveling long distances to attend project meetings was an impediment to two respondents. Reluctant faculty and scheduling of events were hindrances to one respondent each. It should be noted that not all of the replies address characteristics of Quest itself, instead referring to school issues.

Eleven respondents reported that characteristics of Quest had encouraged their schools' ongoing involvement in the network, one of whom provided an answer containing two themes. Seven responses indicated generically that Quest was "beneficial" or "wonderful," for instance. Two responses each suggested that the informative and frequent communications from Quest staff and the value of Quest as an information resource supported their schools' sustained participation. One reply noted that the project's focus on parent and community involvement had encouraged her schools' continued participation.

Survey Findings

Study participants were asked to complete the Quest Engagement Survey (see Appendix D) on which they were to rate the level of importance of 24 variables to, first, their schools' initial involvement with Quest, and second, their schools' sustained involvement with the project. Ratings for initial and sustained involvement were treated as separate variables, for a total of 48 variables. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each factor using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Anchor points on the scale were 1 (*very unimportant*) and 5 (*very important*), and response options included a *don't know* reply.

Fifty-eight surveys were completed and returned. Elementary school respondents comprised 33 of the total and high school respondents 25. Eleven respondents hailed from schools categorized as least engaged, 22 from moderately engaged schools, and 25 from highly engaged schools.

Internal consistency reliabilities of the variables concerning initial and sustained involvement were calculated separately using Cronbach's alpha. With an alpha coefficient of .94, the variables addressing initial involvement of schools in the Quest network have sufficient internal consistency reliability. Likewise, with an alpha coefficient of .89, the variables concerning schools' sustained participation in Quest also possess satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

Descriptive Statistics

Mean ratings for all the factors were calculated; the five most highly rated variables are reported here (see Table 2). The variable rated most important to study participants' schools' initial involvement in Quest was personal beliefs about education and change, with a mean of 4.41 (SD .86)

on the 5-point scale. Also ranked as important to schools' first decision to participate in the project were the vision for learning in the school (4.22, SD 1.09), level of communication within the school (3.96, SD 1.03), relevance of Quest to the school (3.94, SD 1.10), and the match between school and Quest network goals.

Table 2
Factors Rated Most Important to Quest Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	54	4.41	.86
Vision for learning in the school	54	4.22	1.09
Level of communication within the school	52	3.96	1.03
Relevance of Quest to the school	50	3.94	1.10
Match between school and Quest network goals	46	3.93	1.08

While personal beliefs about education and change were also rated as most important to schools' sustained participation in Quest, with a mean of 4.60 (SD .67), there were several differences between respondents' ratings of initial and sustained involvement (see Table 3). Relevance of Quest to the school was ranked the second most important factor to sustained participation (4.43, SD .80), with the ways Quest supports school improvement (through rallies, co-ventures, and symposia, for instance) ranked third (4.38, SD .81). Also highly rated in terms of their significance to ongoing involvement with Quest were the availability of funding to attend project events (4.33, SD 1.06) and the match between school and Quest network goals (4.31, SD .85). It is interesting to note that the variables rated most important to sustained involvement had slightly higher mean scores than the variables rated most important to schools' initial involvement. This may be because schools' initial decision to join Quest required fewer commitments at first, whereas sustained involvement required ongoing commitment and resources, perhaps more challenging to maintain. In addition, standard deviations were also somewhat smaller for variables pertaining to sustained involvement, suggesting there was a bit more agreement among respondents about the importance of various factors to their schools' ongoing participation in Quest.

Mean ratings were calculated for elementary and high school network participants separately. Most important to elementary schools' initial engagement with Quest was the vision for learning in the schools, with a mean of 4.57 (SD .68) (see Table 4). Also highly important to elementary schools' initial involvement were personal beliefs about education and change (4.33, SD .88), the amount of time needed to do improvement work at the school (4.16, SD 1.04), the level of communication within the school (4.10, SD .92), and the match between school and Quest network beliefs (4.04, SD 1.06).

Table 3
Factors Rated Most Important to Quest Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	58	4.60	.67
Relevance of Quest to the school	53	4.43	.80
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	58	4.38	.81
Availability of funding to attend Quest events	54	4.33	1.06
Match between school and Quest network goals	52	4.31	.85

Table 4
Factors Rated Most Important to Elementary Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Vision for learning in the school	30	4.57	.68
Personal beliefs about education and change	30	4.33	.88
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	31	4.16	1.04
Level of communication within school	30	4.10	.92
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	25	4.04	1.06

High school respondents rated the importance of the factors somewhat differently than their elementary school counterparts (see Table 5). Personal beliefs about education and change were ranked most highly, with a mean of 4.50 (SD .83). With a mean of 3.90 (SD 1.04), the match between school and Quest network goals was rated the second most important variable to high schools' initial involvement in Quest. Also ranked most highly by high school respondents were the amount of time needed to attend Quest events (3.83, SD 1.05), the relevance of Quest to the school (3.83, SD 1.11), and the match between school and Quest network beliefs (3.81, SD 1.21).

Elementary respondents appear to have rated the importance of items to their schools' initial participation in Quest more highly than did high school respondents. In addition, three of the five variables rated most highly by high school respondents concern the intersection of school and Quest beliefs and goals. In other words, the match between the school and the reform appears to have been more important to high schools' initial participation than to elementary schools'.

Table 5
Factors Rated Most Important to High Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	24	4.50	.83
Match between school and Quest network goals	21	3.90	1.04
Amount of time needed to attend Quest events	24	3.83	1.05
Relevance of Quest to the school	23	3.83	1.11
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	21	3.81	1.21

As with the overall rating of factors, elementary school participants ranked personal beliefs about education and change as most important to their schools' sustained engagement with the Quest network, with a mean of 4.61 (SD .61) (see Table 6). But the ways in which Quest supports continuous improvement, such as through rallies, co-ventures, and symposia, was rated identically, with a mean of 4.61 (SD .61). Also rated most highly were the relevance of Quest to the school (4.45, SD .91), the vision for learning in the school (4.45, SD .97), and the match between school and Quest network beliefs (4.39, SD .74). Too, standard deviations were below 1.00, indicating a relatively consistent level of agreement among elementary school respondents regarding the importance of the most highly rated factors.

Table 6
Factors Rated Most Important to Elementary Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	33	4.61	.61
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	33	4.61	.61
Relevance of Quest to the school	29	4.45	.91
Vision for learning in the school	33	4.45	.97
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	28	4.39	.74

High school respondents also rated most highly the importance of personal beliefs about education and change to their schools' ongoing participation in Quest (4.60, SD .76) (see Table 7). The relevance of Quest to the school (4.42, SD .65) and Quest processes (4.26, SD .75), such as Data in a Day and the Protocol process, also received high ratings. In addition, high school respondents ranked the amount of information they had received about Quest (4.25, SD .68) and the availability of funding to attend Quest events (4.24, SD 1.09) as among the five most important variables to their schools' continued involvement in the project.

Table 7
Factors Rated Most Important to High Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	25	4.60	.76
Relevance of Quest to the school	24	4.42	.65
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	23	4.26	.75
Amount of information you received about the Quest network	24	4.25	.68
Availability of funding to attend Quest events	21	4.24	1.09

Because Quest staff hypothesized that schools with various degrees of involvement in the project might confront different impediments to or furtherances of their initial and sustained participation, comparisons of mean ratings were made between participants from least, moderately, and highly engaged schools.

In terms of initial involvement in Quest, most highly rated by schools that had dropped out of the network was the vision for learning in the school, with a mean of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 1.33 (see Table 8). Also important were the amount of time to do improvement work at the school (3.91, SD 1.22) and the amount of time needed to attend Quest events (3.91, SD 1.30). With a mean of 3.82 (SD 1.17), personal beliefs about education and change were among the top five most important factors to least engaged schools' initial involvement in Quest, as was the relevance of Quest to the school (3.70, SD .95).

Ranked most important to moderately engaged schools' initial participation were personal beliefs about education and change (4.43, SD .81) (see Table 9). Also important were the vision for learning in the school (4.19, SD .93), the level of communication within the school (3.95, SD 1.02), and the vision of building-level leaders (3.90, SD .97). The factor rated fifth most important to moderately engaged schools' initial involvement in Quest was the amount of time available to individuals for professional development (3.85, SD 1.04). The large standard deviations for the three most highly rated factors suggest, however, that there was some disagreement among respondents concerning the importance of these items to their schools' initial participation in Quest.

Table 8
Factors Rated Most Important to Least Engaged Quest Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Vision for learning in the school	10	4.00	1.33
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	11	3.91	1.22
Amount of time needed to attend Quest events	11	3.91	1.30
Personal beliefs about education and change	11	3.82	1.17
Relevance of Quest to the school	10	3.70	.95

Table 9
Factors Rated Most Important to Moderately Engaged Quest Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	21	4.43	.81
Vision for learning in the school	21	4.19	.93
Level of communication within your school	21	3.95	1.02
Vision of building-level leaders	20	3.90	.97
Amount of time available to individuals for professional development	20	3.85	1.04

Similar to respondents from moderately engaged schools, those from highly engaged schools ranked personal beliefs about education and change as most important to their schools' initial involvement in the Quest network, with a mean of 4.68 (SD .57) (see Table 10). Participants from highly engaged schools also rated highly the importance of the match between school and Quest network goals (4.50, SD .71) and the vision for learning in the school (4.35, SD 1.15). The match between school and Quest network beliefs (4.33, SD 1.03) and the relevance of Quest to the school (4.23, SD 1.15) were rated as the fourth and fifth most significant issues to ongoing participation.

One important difference between respondents from least and highly engaged schools' ratings of most important factors to their schools' initial participation in Quest is that three of the five top-rated factors to highly engaged schools concern the intersection of the schools' goals and philosophy with Quest's. Differently, respondents from the least engaged schools rated most highly two factors that concern logistical issues at the school level, although the relevance of Quest to the school was rated the fifth most important variable to such schools' initial involvement.

Table 10
Factors Rated Most Important to Highly Engaged Quest Schools' Initial Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	22	4.68	.57
Match between school and Quest network goals	18	4.50	.71
Vision for learning in the school	23	4.35	1.15
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	18	4.33	1.03
Relevance of Quest to the school	22	4.23	1.15

An interesting correspondence between ratings from the three levels of school engagement is that the vision for learning in the school and personal beliefs about education and change were ranked among the top five most important variables to initial participation in Quest by respondents from all three levels.

Comparisons between schools at various levels of engagement were also made of ratings of factors to schools' sustained involvement in Quest. Examination of the tables reveals that respondents from all three levels of school engagement rated the importance of factors more highly when asked about their relevance to sustained participation than to initial participation.

Respondents from least engaged schools rated most highly the significance of personal beliefs about education and change (4.36, SD .81) and the amount of time to do improvement work at school (4.36, SD 1.03) to their schools' sustained participation in Quest (see Table 11). Also rated as important were the ways Quest supports school improvement (**through rallies**, co-ventures, and symposia, for instance) (4.27, SD .90) and the amount of time needed to attend Quest events (4.27, SD 1.19). The availability of funding to attend project events (4.09, SD 1.64) was highly rated, although the very large standard deviation suggests that there was some disagreement among respondents concerning this. As these schools had left the Quest network at the time they were surveyed, it can be assumed that these issues were likely impediments to continued involvement.

Participants from moderately engaged schools rated most important to their schools' sustained involvement in Quest personal beliefs about education and change (4.55, SD .74) (see Table 12). With a mean of 4.36 (SD .66), the vision for learning in the school was also important, as was the vision of building-level leaders (4.32, SD .57). Respondents from moderately involved schools also rated highly the relevance of Quest to their school (4.32, SD .67) and the amount of time needed to attend Quest meetings (4.27, SD .77).

Table 11
Factors Rated Most Important to Least Engaged Quest Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	11	4.36	.81
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	11	4.36	1.03
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	11	4.27	.90
Amount of time needed to attend Quest events	11	4.27	1.19
Availability of funding to attend	11	4.09	1.64

Table 12
Factors Rated Most Important to Moderately Engaged Quest Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD
Personal beliefs about education and change	22	4.55	.74
Vision for learning in the school	22	4.36	.66
Vision of building-level leaders	22	4.32	.57
Relevance of Quest to the school	19	4.32	.67
Amount of time needed to attend Quest events	22	4.27	.77

Respondents from highly engaged schools ranked the ways Quest supports school improvement, through events such as rallies and co-ventures, as most significant to their schools' sustained participation (4.80, SD .41) (see Table 13). The relevance of Quest to the school (4.79, SD .41), personal beliefs about education and change (4.76, SD .52), and the match between school and Quest network goals (4.70, SD .56) were also deemed most important by respondents from highly involved schools. Rated fifth most important were Quest processes, such as Data in a Day and the Protocol process, with a mean of 4.68 (SD .48). Also of interest are the small standard deviations, indicating less variance than the other tables.

There appear to be a few differences between ratings by respondents from the three levels of engagement. Three of the five factors rated as most important to least engaged schools' sustained participation in Quest concern logistical matters, such as time and funding. Participants from moderately engaged schools rated among the top five most important factors two variables concerning vision. Two of the five variables rated most important to highly engaged schools'

continued involvement concern the match between the school and Quest, and two others concern Quest itself.

Table 13
Factors Rated Most Important to Highly Engaged Quest Schools' Sustained Participation

Factor	N	Mean	SD
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc)	25	4.80	.41
Relevance of Quest to the school	24	4.79	.41
Personal beliefs about education and change	25	4.76	.52
Match between school and Quest network goals	23	4.70	.56
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	25	4.68	.48

Personal beliefs about education and change remained an important factor to respondents from all three levels of engagement when asked of their relevance to sustained association with Quest. It is also interesting to note that for ratings concerning both initial and sustained involvement, respondents from least engaged schools gave lower ratings of importance to factors than did those from moderately engaged schools, who in turn assigned lower ratings than did those from highly engaged schools.

Tests of Statistical Significance

T-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted in order to explore whether differences in mean ratings of the importance of factors to schools' initial and sustained involvement in Quest were due to actual differences between the groups under investigation or were due to sampling error. In other words, *t* tests and ANOVAs were run to answer the questions, "Are elementary and high school Quest network participants likely from the same population or not?" and "Are respondents from the least, moderately, and highly engaged Quest schools likely from the same population or not?" Because of the exploratory nature of the study, two-tailed *t* tests and ANOVAs were used: Quest staff did not have hypotheses concerning the directionality of differences.

It should be noted that the assumptions of these two statistical tests were violated in this study. The sample was not random, nor was it assumed that the data were drawn from a normally distributed population or that the samples had homogenous variances. Phillips (1982) contends, however, that "since those assumptions now appear to be far less important than originally thought, the recent trend toward increasing use of distribution-free tests is currently being reversed" (p. 139). Likewise, Glass and Hopkins (1984) report research suggesting that violation of the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance has little impact upon the robustness of *t* tests and ANOVAs.

To examine this claim, Quest staff conducted Mann-Whitney *U* and Kruskal-Wallis tests (although even these nonparametric tests assume samples are random) in addition to *t* tests and ANOVAs: Results were quite similar. Administration of the Mann-Whitney *U* test located three additional statistically significant differences as well as those found via *t* tests. The Kruskal-Wallis test replicated ANOVA results and located one additional statistically significant difference. The findings from *t* tests and ANOVAs are reported here; statistically significant nonparametric results are presented in Appendix E. Nonetheless, all findings should be interpreted with caution, given that the samples in the study are not random.

Again due to the exploratory nature of this study, the significance level was set at .10, rather than the conventional .05 or .01. With a significance level of .10, Quest staff might learn of potentially important differences between the groups under investigation that they might not access with lower levels of significance. For Quest staff, the purpose of statistical tests of significance in this study is to identify differences for future, more rigorous exploration.

Statistically significant differences were found between elementary and high school respondents for only 6 of the 48 variables (see Table 14). Statistically significant differences were located between elementary and high school participants' ratings of the importance of three factors to their schools' initial participation in Quest. Elementary participants rated the significance of the amount of time needed to do improvement work at their schools to their schools' first decision to become involved in Quest with a mean of 4.16 (SD 1.04) on the 5-point scale, whereas high school respondents gave a mean rating of 3.48 (.93). With a *t* value of 2.438, the between-group difference in means was statistically significant at the .05 level. Elementary school respondents rated the importance of the amount of time available to them for professional development to their schools' initial participation in Quest with a mean of 4.00 (SD 1.13), while the mean rating for high school participants was 3.45 (SD 1.01). The *t* value of 1.812 was statistically significant at the .10 level. For the variable concerning the importance of the vision for learning in schools to schools' initial association with Quest, elementary respondents had a mean of 4.57 (SD .68), and high school respondents had a mean of 3.79 (SD 1.35). With a *t* value of 2.564, this difference was statistically significant at the .05 level.

Statistically significant differences were also found between elementary and high school respondents' ratings of the importance of three variables to their schools' sustained participation in Quest. Statistically significant differences were again evident for the variables concerning the amount of time needed to do improvement work at the school and to individuals for professional development. Elementary school respondents gave a mean rating for the importance of the amount of time needed to do improvement work at their schools to their schools' continued participation in Quest of 4.39 (SD .70), with high school participants giving a mean rating of 3.96 (SD .98). The *t* value for this difference was 1.950, which was significant at the .10 level. For the variable regarding the amount of time available to individuals for professional development, elementary respondents gave a mean rating of 4.22 (SD 1.07), and high school respondents gave a mean rating of 3.68 (SD 1.13). With a *t* value of 1.772, the between-group difference was statistically significant at .10. A third statistically significant difference was found between elementary and high school

respondents' ratings of the importance of the ways Quest supports school improvement, such as through rallies and co-ventures, to their schools' ongoing participation in the network. The mean rating for elementary respondents was 4.61 (SD .61), while the mean rating for their high school counterparts was 4.08 (SD .95). With a t value of 2.557, the difference was statistically significant at .05.

Table 14
Statistically Significant Quest Involvement T Test Results by School Level

Factor influencing initial involvement in Quest	Level	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean	t Value	df	Prob.
Amount of time needed to do improvement work at school	Elem.	31	4.16	1.04	.19	2.438	50	.018**
	High	21	3.48	.93	.20			
Amount of time available to individuals for professional development	Elem.	31	4.00	1.13	.20	1.812	51	.076*
	High	22	3.45	1.01	.22			
Vision for learning in the school	Elem.	30	4.57	.68	.12	2.564	32.19†	.015**
	High	24	3.79	1.35	.28			

Factor influencing sustained involvement in Quest	Level	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean	t Value	df	Prob.
Amount of time needed to do improvement work at school	Elem.	33	4.39	.70	.12	1.950	54	.056*
	High	23	3.96	.98	.20			
Amount of time available to individuals for professional development	Elem.	32	4.22	1.07	.19	1.772	52	.082*
	High	22	3.68	1.13	.24			
Ways Quest supports continuous school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	Elem.	33	4.61	.61	.11	2.557	56	.013**
	High	25	4.08	.95	.19			

* Statistically significant at the .10 level.

** Statistically significant at the .05 level.

† Degrees of freedom are not represented as whole numbers in this instance because, according to Levene's test for homogeneity of variance, groups rating this item did not possess equal variances. SPSS automatically adjusts the degrees of freedom accordingly.

ANOVAs were conducted to compare the variance between and within groups of respondents based upon the level of their schools' involvement in Quest. A total of 12 statistically significant differences were found at the exploratory .10 level. Post hoc tests were conducted to determine among which of the three groups the statistically significant differences were located. The Scheffe test was used for groups determined by Levene's test for homogeneity of variance to have equal variances, while Dunnett's C was used for those determined not to have equal variances. Statistically significant ANOVA results are presented in Table 15.

Five statistically significant differences were located with respect to factors impacting schools' initial participation in Quest. With an F ratio of 2.773, statistically significant at the .10

level (F probability of .072), respondents from highly engaged Quest schools rated the importance of the scheduling of Quest events to their schools' initial involvement in the project more highly than did their moderately engaged colleagues. Participants from highly engaged schools rated the significance of personal beliefs to their schools' first association with the network statistically significantly more highly than participants from the least engaged schools (F ratio of 4.169, F probability of .021). Respondents from highly involved schools rated the importance of the match between school and Quest network goals higher than did respondents from both moderately and least engaged schools (F ratio of 4.835, F probability of .013). The ways Quest supports school improvement was rated statistically significantly higher by those from highly involved schools than by those from least involved schools (F ratio of 2.796, F probability of .071). Last, participants from highly engaged schools rated statistically significantly higher than their counterparts from least engaged schools the importance of Quest processes to their schools' initial involvement in the project (F ratio of 3.323, F probability of .045).

Seven statistically significant differences were located with regard to factors influencing schools' sustained participation in Quest. With an F ratio of 3.643, statistically significant at the .05 level (F probability of .033), respondents from highly involved schools rated higher the importance of the scheduling of Quest events to their schools' ongoing participation than did their colleagues from both moderately and least engaged schools. With an F ratio of 5.083, statistically significant at the .01 level (F probability of .009), those from the least involved Quest schools rated more lowly than their moderately and highly engaged counterparts the importance of the vision for learning in their schools to their continued participation. Both the relevance of Quest to the school (F ratio of 7.165, F probability of .002) and the match between school and Quest network goals (F ratio of 5.496, F probability of .007) were rated statistically significantly higher by participants from the most engaged schools than by those from either moderately or least engaged schools. The match between school and Quest network beliefs was rated higher by those from highly involved schools than by those from the least involved schools (F ratio of 3.117, F probability of .053). With an F ratio of 8.040, statistically significant at the .001 level (F probability of .001), respondents from highly engaged schools rated higher than their colleagues from moderately engaged schools the importance of the ways Quest supports school improvement to their schools' ongoing participation. Respondents from highly engaged schools rated statistically significantly higher than those from moderately engaged schools, who in turn rated higher than those from the least engaged schools, the importance of Quest processes to their schools' continued involvement in the project (F ratio 10.306, F probability of .0001).

Table 15
Statistically Significant Quest Involvement ANOVA Results by Level of Engagement

Factor influencing initial involvement in Quest	df	F ratio	F probability	Significant differences by group
Scheduling of Quest events	2 49	2.773	.072*	high > moderate
Personal beliefs about education and change	2 51	4.169	.021**	high > low
Match between school and Quest network goals	2 43	4.835	.013**	high > moderate, low
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, symposia, etc.)	2 50	2.796	.071*	high > low
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	2 45	3.323	.045**	high > low

Factor influencing sustained involvement in Quest	df	F ratio	F probability	Significant differences by group
Scheduling of Quest events	2 53	3.643	.033**	high > moderate, low
Vision for learning in the school	2 55	5.083	.009***	low < moderate, high
Relevance of Quest to the school	2 50	7.165	.002***	high > moderate, low
Match between school and Quest network goals	2 49	5.496	.007***	high > moderate, low
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	2 48	3.117	.053*	high > low
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, symposia, etc.)	2 55	8.040	.001****	high > moderate
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	2 52	10.306	.0001*****	high > moderate > low

- * Statistically significant at the .10 level.
- ** Statistically significant at the .05 level.
- *** Statistically significant at the .01 level.
- **** Statistically significant at the .001 level.
- ***** Statistically significant at the .0001 level.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

A variety of conclusions may be drawn based upon the data. Focus group and interview data are most suggestive of overall themes important to schools' involvement in reform, whereas the survey data allow for somewhat more detailed comparisons of themes between elementary and high school participants, and between respondents from least, moderately, and highly involved schools. Conclusions from the qualitative and quantitative data diverge, in part, because of differences in the methodologies themselves. For instance, respondents offered different assessments of the factors important to their schools' participation when asked to do so in an open-ended format than when they were requested to rate predetermined factors.

Qualitative Conclusions

Focus group and interview data clearly suggest that administrative support for involvement in an externally facilitated school improvement endeavor is a key component to schools' initial and sustained participation. Such support appears to be important in two major ways. First, central office and building-level administrators have the capacity to secure funding, substitute coverage, and released time to enable the involvement of school community members in the reform effort. Respondents in this study saw a clear link between administrative support and access to such resources. Second, active administrative support is vital to the success of improvement work faculty choose to undertake at their schools. Respondents noted that passive or merely verbal support of their efforts by administrators was not sufficient to convince others in the school to accept or champion reform.

Relatedly, the availability of funding to support school participation in reform appears to be an important furtherance to ongoing involvement. Respondents from more involved schools reported their awareness of how important money was to their participation, while those from less involved schools noted that its lack impeded their continued involvement.

Also clearly significant to school staffs' initial and continued involvement in school improvement reform is the relevance of the reform to schools' concerns, goals, and beliefs. The overlap of school issues and content to be offered by Quest piqued school staffs' original interest in participation. Similarly, continued relevance helped sustain their involvement in the network over time. Participants from schools that had left the network or were uncertain about their continued involvement, conversely, reported that they questioned the relevance of Quest to their schools' interests.

Schoolwide consensus for involvement in a school reform effort appears to be an important contribution to initial participation. Likewise, school willingness to accept feedback and institute change seems to influence schools' ongoing engagement with reform. Respondents in this study

thought that without such openness to self-analysis and transformation, schools would not participate in Quest in the first place, let alone over time.

Ongoing participation in reform seems to be hindered by the competing priorities school community members must manage at their schools. These range from daily school functions to administering before- and after-school programs to involvement in additional school reform projects. The variety of efforts school staff undertake results in feelings of overcommitment, lack of time to participate in other endeavors, and a sense of staff shortage to accommodate all the work.

Time is also a concern to participants in ongoing school improvement work. First, finding the time to attend project events away from school is an issue, particularly as such excursions involve acquiring substitute coverage, completing make-up grading and other work, and sacrificing time from additional school commitments and from families. And second, unearthing time for reflecting, planning, and implementing specific reform initiatives is a challenge for school community members whose days are already filled with regular school duties.

Logistical concerns were especially important to those from small schools, who thought that finding time and resources to engage in sustained school reform was a greater challenge due to their fewer staff. On the other hand, respondents from larger schools noted that they faced similar issues.

Interestingly, it appears that, for some respondents, positive prior experience with AEL services influenced their schools' initial decision to participate in the Quest project. In other words, the organizational reputation facilitated involvement.

Quantitative Conclusions

Survey data provide a different perspective on the issues impacting initial and sustained participation in school improvement endeavors, allowing comparisons between elementary and high school respondents and between those from least, moderately, and highly engaged network schools.

Neither focus group nor interview data indicated that personal beliefs about education and change were particularly important to schools' involvement in improvement efforts. However, mean ratings from survey data clearly suggest that all participants surveyed thought such beliefs to have been most important to their schools' first and continued engagement with Quest.

School factors, such as the vision for learning and the level of communication within a school, importantly influence schools' initial decision to participate in a school reform project such as Quest. But the relevance of Quest to the school and the nexus of school and network goals are also important to initial involvement.

Sustained involvement is supported slightly differently by various factors. The relevance of Quest to the school becomes more important. A characteristic of the project itself, how it supports

school improvement, becomes meaningful, as does the availability of funding to attend network meetings. The match between school and project goals remains important.

Quest staff had hypothesized that high schools would confront different challenges to initial and ongoing participation in the project than elementary schools. Differences in mean ratings indicate several differences in this study. In addition, high school respondents tended to rate the importance of factors to their schools' initial and sustained involvement somewhat lower than their elementary school counterparts, although the gap lessened slightly with regard to ongoing participation.

Differences in mean ratings suggest a divergence in the importance of various factors to elementary versus high schools' initial participation in the project. School factors, such as the vision for learning, amount of time available to do improvement work, and level of communication with the school, appear to have been most important to elementary schools' first decision to become involved in Quest. High school respondents, on the other hand, report that issues concerning the relevance of the project to their schools was most important to initial involvement.

Personal beliefs about education and change were nearly equally highly important to elementary and high school participants' schools' sustained participation. Relevance of the project to the school and school beliefs appeared to become somewhat more important to elementary schools when respondents were asked to assess their ongoing involvement. And characteristics of Quest itself, such as the amount of information received about the project and project processes for needs assessment and reflection, seemed to become slightly more important to high schools' continued participation.

Quest staff also predicted that schools with various levels of involvement with the project might find different factors important to their participation. And mean differences in ratings of factors do suggest several divergent concerns. While personal beliefs about education and change were important to schools from all three levels of engagement and their initial participation, they were most important to respondents from moderately and highly engaged schools. The vision for learning in the school, on the other hand, was most important to the original participation of those from the least engaged schools. Nonetheless, the vision for learning in a school and personal beliefs about education and change were among the most important contributing factors to schools' initial participation from all three levels of involvement.

Time to attend project events and do improvement work were also important factors in the least engaged schools' initial involvement in Quest. Respondents from moderately engaged schools were more concerned with school factors, including the vision for learning and the level of communication within their schools, as well as the vision of building-level leaders and the amount of time available to individuals for professional development. Differently, those from highly engaged schools were most attentive to issues of relevance when initially considering participation in Quest; three of the five factors most highly rated by these respondents concerned the nexus between project and school foci.

As with initial participation, personal beliefs about education and change continued to be important contributors to continued participants across the three levels of engagement. However, whereas such beliefs had been most important to highly and moderately involved schools in terms of their initial participation, they became most important to those from least and moderately engaged schools' ongoing involvement.

There were several other differences as well. School-level factors were most important to least and moderately engaged schools' sustained association with Quest. For least engaged schools, these included logistical matters such as the amount of time to do improvement work at school and the availability of funding. School vision for learning and building-level vision were important for moderately engaged schools' ongoing involvement. Respondents from highly engaged schools were most concerned with the relevance of Quest to their schools and characteristics of Quest itself.

Respondents from elementary and high schools were statistically significantly different from each other in six of their ratings of the importance of various factors to their schools' participation in Quest. In terms of initial participation in the project, the amount of time needed to do improvement work at school, the amount of time needed to attend Quest events, and the vision for learning in the school were statistically significantly more important to elementary school respondents than to their high school counterparts. The amount of time needed to do improvement work and to attend network events were also statistically significantly more important to participants from elementary schools, as were the ways Quest supports school improvement, such as through rallies and co-ventures. It thus appears that elementary school respondents are likely truly different from their high school colleagues in terms of the importance of these six factors to their schools' initial participation in the project.

Twelve statistically significant differences were located among respondents from schools at three levels of engagement with Quest. Five of these pertained to factors influencing schools' initial involvement in the project. The scheduling of project events was statistically significantly more important to highly involved schools than to moderately involved schools. Highly engaged schools appear to have been more concerned with the match between school and Quest network goals than either their moderately or least engaged counterparts. And personal beliefs about education, the ways Quest supports school improvement, and Quest processes were more important to highly engaged schools than to the least engaged schools' original participation.

The seven remaining statistically significant differences concerned schools' sustained participation in the network. The scheduling of Quest events, relevance of Quest to the school, and the match between school and network goals were more important to highly involved schools than to either moderately or least engaged schools. In terms of Quest processes, highly engaged schools found them more important to sustained involvement than did moderately engaged schools, who in turn reported them more important than did the least engaged schools. The least engaged schools found less important to continued participation than either their moderately and highly involved counterparts the vision for learning in their schools. The match between school and Quest network beliefs was more important to respondents from highly engaged than least engaged schools, and the

ways Quest supports school improvement was more important to highly than moderately engaged schools.

Recommendations

Recommendations are offered to Quest staff based upon the conclusions drawn above.

First, Quest staff should acknowledge that some factors are beyond their purview in terms of recruiting and maintaining the participation of some network schools. These include school issues, such as the level of communication within a school and school vision for learning. Similarly, school community members' personal beliefs about education and change are particularly beyond the reach of project staff influence during recruitment.

Nonetheless, because relevance of the project to schools contributes so importantly to initial and sustained school participation, Quest staff should be alert to the variety of ways their project might intersect with each schools' goals, concerns, and beliefs in spite of other school factors outside their purview. To take advantage of such intersections fully, project staff may consider gathering some relevant information about potential network schools prior to recruitment, should the project continue through additional iterations.

In order to maintain continued school interest and engagement, Quest staff should also consider conducting ongoing assessment of the goals and concerns network schools have throughout their participation. Although the project cannot attempt successfully to meet all the needs of all network schools, it can continually align its work with school interests or make serious attempts to do so.

Relatedly, because of the flexibility and non-directive nature of the project, Quest is especially well-suited to ensure that any network endeavor does not add to the burdens of schools already attempting to manage a variety of competing priorities. Continuous monitoring of individual schools' undertakings may provide project staff the information they need to integrate Quest and school efforts.

Given the importance of active administrative support to schools' involvement in the project, Quest staff should consider strategies to secure, nurture, and maintain it over time. Some participants reported that their prior knowledge of AEL influenced their decision to participate in the Quest project; exploiting the "power of weak ties" is one way of courting potential network schools. Another strategy might include using knowledge of the ways Quest and school goals overlap to recruit schools, and then ensuring continued overlap to encourage ongoing participation. Offering individualized support to administrators throughout the project may also invite their sustained engagement. Alternatively, Quest staff might consider, in possible further iterations of the project and under optimum circumstances, admitting to the network only those schools that appear to have strong, unambiguous support from building-level administrators, who in turn have similar support from their central offices.

Schoolwide consensus for involvement in Quest also appears quite important to schools' participation. Project staff might consider instituting methods similar to those used in other school reform efforts to ensure that the majority of those in network school communities agree to become involved. These methods include requiring potential project school communities to vote via secret ballot for or against participation. Quest staff have requested network schools to sign a cooperative agreement, but they did so after approximately 18 months of project activity. Such a strategy may be more appropriate at the beginning of project work.

Quest staff should be alert to differences in the factors elementary and high school network respondents thought to be important to their schools' involvement in the project. For instance, time to attend project events and to conduct improvement work at school seem to be more important to elementary school participation than to high school. During recruitment, staff might consider offering schools strategies for finding such time. Continued consultation on the matter of time may also prove helpful to elementary schools throughout the project. In terms of sustained participation, the ways Quest supports school improvement, such as via rallies and co-ventures, are important to elementary schools; project staff should continue offering appealing venues for such schools.

Elementary and high school differences in mean ratings of the importance of variables to their involvement suggest that high schools may be more concerned with external factors than elementary schools, such as the overlap between Quest and school goals and Quest processes. Elementary schools, on the other hand, appear somewhat more concerned, especially in terms of initial involvement, with issues internal to the school. (The relevance of the project to elementary schools does become more important with regard to continued participation, however.) Consequently, project staff should examine the possibility of recruiting and supporting elementary and high schools differently.

In terms of offering support to schools that have been least involved in the project, difference in mean ratings suggest that they may be somewhat more concerned with logistical matters than other schools. Given that administrative support is seen as central to brokering time and funding, Quest staff should give some attention to strategies for ensuring that administrators recognize the need for their action in terms of resolving logistical issues. Alternatively, project staff might offer less engaged schools more support or technical assistance in terms of methods for finding time and funding.

Relevance and the match between school and network goals and beliefs appear to contribute significantly to highly involved schools' participation. Quest staff should therefore maintain their focus on assisting schools reach their own goals. In addition, project staff should be alert to the ways characteristics of Quest itself are received by network participants. Quest processes, for instance, are most important to those from highly involved schools, less so for moderately involved schools, and even less so for the least engaged schools.

Much more, and more rigorous, investigation of what influences participation in school reform needs to be conducted. Further study, for instance, ought to include randomization techniques to bolster generalizability and ensure the appropriateness of inferential statistical methods. A larger study including participants in other reform efforts might yield important insights about the significance of various factors to schools operating in other reform contexts. Substantively, Quest staff may want to examine the relationship between school level and degree of involvement, and whether an interaction between the two influences the importance of various factors to participation; the small sample size in this study precludes a valid investigation of this. Also, project staff should reconsider the scale used and explore the reasons elementary schools and highly engaged schools tended to have higher ratings overall than other respondents. It is possible that respondents interpreted the scale in terms of whether or not their schools possessed each of the factors rather than in terms of the level of importance of each to their involvement. Another avenue for exploration might include factor analyses to examine, for instance, whether the variables concerning relevance and the match between project and school goals and beliefs in fact represent one underlying construct.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A:

Quest Brochure and Framework for Continuous Improvement

Quest for Quality Learning Communities

A Program for Continuous School Improvement

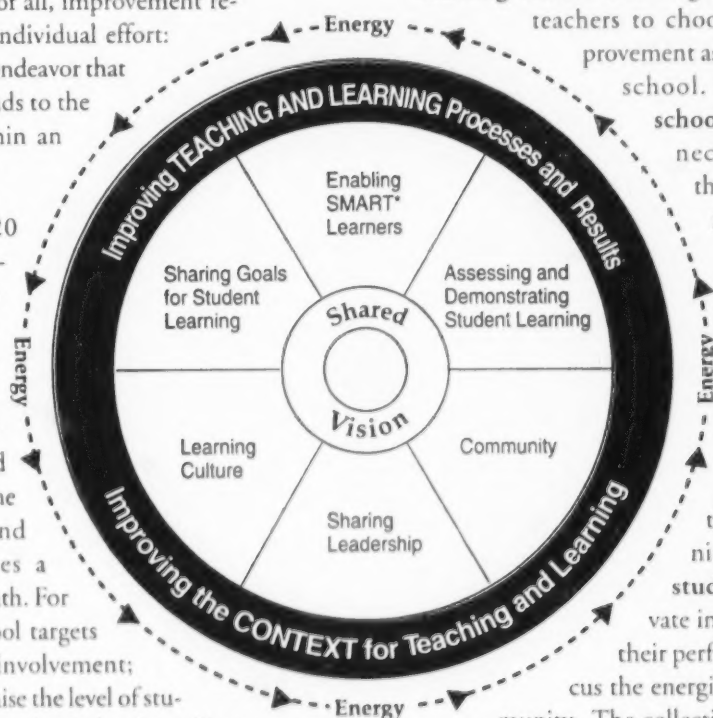
School improvement is challenging work; to be effective, it must be continuous. Improvement is not a single act or program; it is a process of always wanting to learn more about how better to help all students achieve at higher levels. Improvement is visionary; it involves risk-taking, uncertainty, and a rejection of "doing what we've always done." Most of all, improvement requires more than individual effort: it is a collaborative endeavor that engages and responds to the diverse voices within an entire community.

Teams from 20 schools in a four-state region now collaborate with staff from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to study and learn together in the Quest project, and each school takes a slightly different path. For example, one school targets increased parent involvement; another hopes to raise the level of student thinking through teachers' working together and coaching one another; a high school improves teaching by listening to what students say about how they learn best; other schools focus on specific curriculum areas such as writing or science education.

The Quest framework unifies their thinking about school improvement. These **core values** offer a blueprint for continuous progress: ongoing questioning of practice, high expectations for all, in-

dividual responsibility for better performance, collegial sharing and support, and thoughtful reflection on practice.

Stemming from these values is a clearly defined **vision** of student excellence that is shared by all members of the school community. A strong **learning culture** encourages both students and teachers to choose continuous improvement as a way of life in their school. Members of the school community connect to one another through a shared commitment to improved learning conditions for all. **Shared leadership** encourages and enables everyone to assume responsibility for making a positive impact on the school community. **Shared goals for student learning** motivate individuals to improve their performance and help focus the energies of the entire community. The collection, analysis, and use of **student assessment data** sustains continuous improvement, providing a measure of the effectiveness of the community's efforts. **SMART learners** are Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful. Fully equipped to become lifelong learners, they are ready for life and work in the 21st century. In short, continuous improvement spawns the **energy** and excitement necessary to transform a collection of individuals into a true learning community.



Goals of the Quest Project

1. **Connect with colleagues.** By serving on a Quest leadership team, participants connect with others on their school team, forming bonds that enhance working relationships. In addition, Quest teams connect with teams from other schools, districts, and states, allowing everyone to learn from others' experiences. A listserv, inquiry@ael.org, facilitates connections across the network.
2. **Create a learning community.** Teams become part of the Quest network learning community with the expectation of recognizing this experience in their own community.
3. **Connect with concepts and stories related to continuous school improvement.** At Quest rallies, the Quest framework is a source of study, dialogue, and sharing among teams.
4. **Create personal and shared meaning.** The Quest network places a high value on processes such as reflection and dialogue, which lead to deeper understandings of continuous improvement.
5. **Commit to continue learning with this community.** Quest schools have made a three-year commitment to study and learn together, with a focus on improving student achievement.
6. **Commit to continue the Quest back home.** The "rubber hits the road" at schools, not at Quest events. AEL helps school teams take their learnings home and apply them for the benefit of students. Site visits, called Co-Ventures in Learning, provide opportunities for AEL staff to visit each school, in order to better understand the context of that school's efforts, and tailor assistance to the school's needs.

What is a learning community?

"Learning communities are essentially communities of inquirers . . . sustained by a continued commitment to share this journey of exploration with one another on matters people care deeply about" (Ryan, 1995).

Peter Senge et al. (1994) write that a learning organization "is a place where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, . . . and where people are continually learning how to learn together."

The Quest project hopes to achieve results at three different levels:

- For individuals, sharing leadership on a Quest team leads to more reflective practice and renewed understanding of the concepts that support continuous improvement.
- For schools, Quest will provide motivation and support for ongoing and/or new school-based initiatives to improve teaching and learning.
- For the Quest network of schools, our collaborative learning and research will yield stories, insights, processes, and products—all of which will be helpful to the broader educational community.

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract RJ6006001. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government. AEL is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer. 1/99



APPENDIX B:
Focus Group Protocol

Engagement Study
Focus Group Protocol

1. How would you describe your school's level of involvement with Quest? What does involvement in Quest require of your school?

2. When your school was **first** considering becoming involved with the Quest project, what factors or issues influenced your school's decision?

A. Specifically, what **school factors** seemed to be most important in determining the decision to be involved in Quest?

B. And what characteristics or **factors of Quest** seemed to be most important in determining your school's decision to be involved in Quest?

3. It is sometimes challenging to **stay involved** over time in a large project.

A. What about your **school** helps your school stay involved with Quest? Gets in the way of your staying involved?

B. What about **Quest** itself helps your school stay involved? Gets in the way of staying involved?

(Optional probes)

4. What most attracted your school to being involved with Quest? What most attracts your school now?

5. What was least attractive to your school about being involved with Quest when you first began? What is least attractive now?

APPENDIX C:

Telephone Interview Script and Protocol

Phone interview protocol

Hello. This is (name) with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Quest project. May I please speak with (name)?

Hello. This is (name) with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Quest project. We mailed you a letter about two weeks ago requesting that you talk with us briefly. Did you receive it?

If no: We are studying what helps or gets in the ways of schools' participation in a network like Quest. I have several questions I'd like to ask about this. This should only take about 5 or 10 minutes.

If yes: As the letter explained, we are studying what helps or gets in the ways of schools' participation in a network like Quest. I have several questions I'd like to ask. This should only take 5 or 10 minutes.

And is now a good time for you to speak with me?

If no: When would be a better time for us to talk? <record reply> I will call you then. Thank you!

If yes: Before we begin, I'd like to assure you that anything we discuss will remain anonymous and confidential. Because all the data I collect will be aggregated, nothing you say will be attributable to you in any way. Do you have any questions?

Let's begin . . . (ask interview questions and record answers)

I also have a brief survey I'd like to ask you to take. I could administer it to you over the phone or I could fax it to you, and ask you to return fax it. Which would you prefer?

If fax: Could I have your fax number, please?

If over phone: I am going to read a list of factors to you. Please rate how important each one was to, first, your school's **initial** decision to get involved in Quest, and second, to your school's involvement **over time**. The scale is 1 to 5. 1 is "very unimportant," 3 is "neither unimportant nor important," and 5 is "very important." Do you have any questions?

(Read each factor, circling responses as you go. Prompt if necessary to specify initial and sustained involvement.)

We have finished. Thank you for talking with me. We appreciate your input very much.

Phone interview protocol

School:

Interviewee role:

1. Please describe what **school factors** seemed to be most important in determining your school's decision to be involved in Quest.

2. And what characteristics or **factors of Quest** seemed to be most important in determining your school's decision to be involved in Quest?

3. It is sometimes challenging to **stay involved** over time in a large project. What about your **school** has gotten in the way of your school's staying involved? (If school is still involved, ask what about the school helps them stay involved.)

4. What about **Quest** itself has gotten in the way of your school's staying involved? (If school is still involved, ask what about Quest helps them stay involved.)

APPENDIX D:
Quest Engagement Survey

Please read the following list of factors. On a scale of 1 to 5, first rate how important each factor was to your school's **initial** decision to be involved in the Quest network. In the next column, rate how important each factor has been to your school's **sustained** involvement in Quest.

	Very unimportant 1	Unimportant 2	Neither unimportant nor important 3	Important 4	Very important 5					
Factors influencing your school's . . .	Initial involvement in Quest					Sustained involvement in Quest				
Amount of time needed to attend events	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Amount of time available to you for professional development	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to get substitute coverage	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Scheduling	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of funding to attend	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Level of communication within your school	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Legacy of prior reform projects in your school	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Vision of building-level leaders	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Turnover in building-level leadership	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

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Factors influencing your school's . . .**Initial involvement in Quest****Sustained involvement in Quest**

Vision for learning in the school

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Influence of central office

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Schoolwide consensus for involvement

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Amount of information you received concerning
the Quest network

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Relevance of Quest to the school

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Personal beliefs about education and change

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Schoolwide resistance to change

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Match between school and network goals

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Match between school and network beliefs

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

How Quest was introduced to you

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

How Quest supports school improvement

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Quest processes

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

How Quest ties in with accountability to your
district

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

How Quest ties in with accountability to your
state department

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

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APPENDIX E:

Tables of Statistically Significant Quest Involvement Results
from Nonparametric Tests

Table 16
Statistically Significant Quest Involvement Mann-Whitney *U* Test Results

Factor influencing initial involvement in Quest	Level	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>	Wilcoxon <i>W</i>	<i>z</i> score	Prob.
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	Elem. High	31 21	4.16 3.48	1.04 .93	175.000	406.000	-2.988	.003***
Amount of time available to individuals for professional development	Elem. High	31 22	4.00 3.45	1.13 1.01	230.500	483.500	-2.083	.037**
History of prior reform efforts at the school	Elem. High	30 17	3.93 3.24	1.48 1.30	168.500	321.500	-2.008	.045**
Vision for learning in the school	Elem. High	30 24	4.57 3.79	.68 1.35	236.500	536.500	-2.371	.018**
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	Elem. High	28 20	3.75 3.25	1.27 1.07	203.000	413.000	-1.666	.096*

Factor influencing sustained involvement in Quest	Level	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i>	Wilcoxon <i>W</i>	<i>z</i> score	Prob.
Amount of time to do improvement work at school	Elem. High	33 23	4.39 3.96	.70 .98	277.000	553.000	-1.892	.059*
Amount of time available to individuals for professional development	Elem. High	32 22	4.22 3.68	1.07 1.13	243.500	496.500	-2.024	.043**
Vision for learning in the school	Elem. High	33 25	4.45 4.04	.97 1.10	295.000	620.000	-2.047	.041**
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	Elem. High	33 25	4.25 4.08	.61 .95	282.500	607.500	-2.280	.023**

* Statistically significant at the .10 level.

** Statistically significant at the .05 level.

*** Statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 17
Statistically Significant Quest Involvement Kruskal-Wallis Test Results²

Factor influencing initial involvement in Quest	df	Chi-square	Prob.
Scheduling of Quest events	2	5.580	.061*
Personal beliefs about education and change	2	5.734	.057*
Match between school and Quest network goals	2	9.243	.010***
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	2	5.684	.058*
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, co-ventures, etc.)	2	5.860	.053*
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc.)	2	6.831	.033**

Factor influencing sustained involvement in Quest	df	Chi-square	Prob.
Scheduling of Quest events	2	5.685	.058*
Vision for learning in the school	2	6.264	.044**
Relevance of Quest to the school	2	9.456	.009***
Match between school and Quest network goals	2	11.397	.003***
Match between school and Quest network beliefs	2	6.314	.043**
Ways Quest supports school improvement (rallies, symposia, etc)	2	13.721	.001****
Quest processes (Data in a Day, Protocol process, etc)	2	12.276	.002***

- * Statistically significant at the .10 level.
- ** Statistically significant at the .05 level.
- *** Statistically significant at the .01 level.
- **** Statistically significant at the .001 level.

² SPSS does not permit the use of post hoc tests following the Kruskal-Wallis test. Group differences are therefore not reported here. However, because the results from this test are almost identical to those from the ANOVAs presented earlier, one might assume differences located by the Scheffe and Dunnet's C tests conducted thereafter to be identical as well.

APPENDIX F:
Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

- ☐ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
☐ evaluation plan/design/proposal
☐ evaluation contract
☐ evaluation report
☒ other: evaluation/research report

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The Standards were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor	The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1 Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2 Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3 Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4 Values Identification	X			
U5 Report Clarity	X			
U6 Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7 Evaluation Impact	X			
F1 Practical Procedures	X			
F2 Political Viability			X	
F3 Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1 Service Orientation	X			
P2 Formal Agreements	X			
P3 Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4 Human Interactions	X			
P5 Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6 Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7 Conflict of Interest	X			
P8 Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1 Program Documentation	X			
A2 Context Analysis	X			
A3 Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4 Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5 Valid Information	X			
A6 Reliable Information	X			
A7 Systematic Information	X			
A8 Analysis of Quantitative Information	X			
A9 Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10 Justified Conclusions	X			
A11 Impartial Reporting	X			
A12 Metaevaluation	X			

Name Caitlin Howley-Rowe

Date: 7/16/99

(typed)

(signature)

Position or Title: Research Assistant

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Agency: AEL, Inc.

Address: P.O. Box 1348 Charleston, WV 25325

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